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VOL. XXVI.—No. 6 NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER, 1895

Per Annum, Two Dollars  
Single Copies, 20 Cents

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Entered at New York Post-Office as Second Class Mail Matter.

# The Decorator and Furnisher

PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT

114 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, by

THE ART TRADES PUBLISHING AND PRINTING CO., Inc:

E. B. HARTLEY, President.

W. R. BRADSHAW, TREAS. AND EDITOR. W. H. GIBSON, SEC. AND ADV. MGR.

Our subscribers and advertisers are requested to make all checks, or money orders, payable to the order of The Art Trades Publishing and Printing Co., 114 Fifth Avenue, New York.

Subscription \$2 per year, in advance

(PATENT BINDER, \$1.00 EXTRA.)

Single Copies, - - - 20 Cents.

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**A** *S resina de algarroba* is the basis of all varnish, the varnish trade and piano and furniture manufacturers will be interested in the recent discovery of vast alluvial deposits in the San José region in Colombia, South America. An analysis of the gum has been made by Professor Doremus of New York, with gratifying results, his opinion being that the new gum will compare most favorably with the famous Cauri gum of New Zealand, the highest grade of varnish gum known to commerce.

**G**UMS of this quality are at present only, in New Zealand, Zanzibar and Australia. A few slight formations have been discovered in Mexico, but these have subsequently proved to be of no value. As this gum is the body of all varnishes, it will be seen that its production in large quantities in a country so near New York as Colombia is will be a matter of considerable commercial importance.

**G**UM copal is simply an accumulation of exudations from the algarroba tree, extending over an indefinite period of time. The gum is found in large lumps in the soft alluvial soil at the foot of the tree. The tree itself, which resembles our beech in appearance, can be tapped like a rubber tree. But the sap, or gum thus produced, lacking the seasoning of age, is practically worthless. Indeed, the deeper in the ground, that is, the older the *resina de algarroba* is found, the more valuable it is as a varnish.

**A**N American Company has been formed on June 19, 1895, known as the Columbian Algarroba Company, under the laws of the State of New York, for the purpose of mining and exporting the *resina de algarroba* or gum copal, from Colombia. A concession has been obtained from the Colombian Government giving this company the sole right to mine gum copal in Colombia for the next twenty years. In return for this grant, the government will exact the sum of one dollar (Colombian) for every quintal (101.42 pounds) of copal shipped from this country. The labor of digging for it is comparatively light, and native women may be employed

for the purpose at a cost of two cents a day. The entire cost of the gum delivered in New York will not exceed ten cents a pound.

**J**APANESE shops are as enticing as those of Paris, and the money of the tourist slips away from him here faster than he is aware of. Although prices are very low for everything except imported merchandise, one scarcely realizes what inroads he makes on his letter of credit until he comes to figure up how much he is going to need to get home.

**T**HE rarest and most beautiful obis are now obtained of dealers in second-hand goods and in the curio shops, where they have drifted from the kuras (fire-proof wardrobes) of the aristocracy and the geisha (dancing girls) who have become impoverished. The best place to buy them is in the cities of the interior. The same is true of all old brocades and embroideries. You pay three times as much for similar articles in Yokohama as in Kioto or in Nagoya, and ten times as much in London or New York. The obi is useless, however, except as an ornament. Its colors are too gay for modern taste, and it is too short and narrow.

**S**PANGLES, or "flitters," as they are known in the trade, which was so marked a feature of last season's millinery and are now being largely used in the ornamentation of ladies' gowns, have already invaded the domain of the upholsterer. Some recent draperies have been trimmed with heavy embroidery in which spangles were used, but the effect was not such as to lead to the belief that the idea will gain any footing. Spangles are not, as is generally supposed, made of metal, which they are so often bronzed, gilded or silvered to represent. A black composition is spread upon glass plates, hardened in kilns at a high temperature and stripped off in thin sheets, which are then colored. These are fed automatically into stamping machines, and, although they come pouring out like water from a pump, manufacturers have all they can do to supply the present demand.

**A**N entirely new departure is shown by a prominent manufacturer of Wilton carpets. A series of borders have been designed by leading artists. In these a string of roses or other flowers run in bold relief through the centre of the border. The groundwork is, say, a pale olive, shading off to a deeper color toward the outer edge. It would, of course, be in the highest degree ungraceful for the string of flowers, on reaching the corner of the room, to turn at right angles to itself and run along the next side of the room. To avoid this, corner squares are made, the design of which is a wreath of similar flowers, in which the floral rope loses itself, emerging naturally as it starts on its journey around the adjoining side of the carpet. In this way all mitring of borders is done away with, and the border more than ever simulates what it is intended to be, a frame for the carpet.

**T**HE excavations of the buried city of Guatemala are proceeding apace. The city lies on the Pompeii plantation of Señor Alvarado, on the slopes of the Volcan de Agun. Besides glazed ware, handsome vases, engraved and painted in bright colors, domestic utensils, such as the Indians use to-day, stone weapons and idols, and jewels of turquoise and chalchivilly, a deep green gem formerly worn by Indian chiefs, have been unearthed. One clay idol represents a plump little god, who seems to be the incarnation of jollity, and betrays a sense of humor in the ancient people such as we find in certain old Greek statuettes. Some of the carved faces also show a tragic mask. The ancient Roman, the American Indian, and the Mongolian features are all represented on the idols. Some of the skeletons are over six feet in length, and they are found straightened out, or sitting, or in vases. Skulls, each with a chalchivilly stone, wrought like a tongue in its mouth, and sometimes a perforated stone hung beneath the nose, are also found in vases. These skulls have broad, high foreheads, prominent cheek bones, and projecting chins. Apparently they have been preserved as sacred relics of the dead.

**I**N judging of contemporary furniture one must always bear in mind the character of the market for which it is produced. The large majority of our people possess only a transient tenure in their dwellings, and the absorbing nature of the struggle that most of us have to make to win the necessary provisions of life prevent our encouraging the manufacture of well-wrought furniture. We mean to outgrow our houses. Our lease will expire after so many years, and then we shall want an entirely different class of furniture, consequently we purchase articles that have only sufficient life in them to last the brief period of our occupation, and are content to abide by want of appropriateness and beauty, with a vague hope of some day surrounding ourselves with objects that shall be joys to us for the remainder of our life.

**T**HEN, again, the rapid rate at which we live, the extraordinary facilities of modern travel, the maelstrom of ideas drawn from every end of the globe which form our daily mental food, has produced an eager desire for novelty without the necessary judgment to discriminate between the good and the bad. So long as the purchaser of so-called decorative furniture, carpets, curtains, or merely ornamental articles, prefers novelty of design to intrinsic worth, the natural result will be the productions of either heavy and ugly, or flimsy and inappropriate furniture, which will be condemned by every man of taste.

**B**Y reason of the expense, as well as because houses are generally in the transient occupation of their tenants, the custom of employing architects to design interior fittings and furniture of buildings so as to harmonize the furniture with the house appears to be abandoned, and people generally prefer the cheapness of painted, and artificially grained pine wood with the showy decorative effects of wall-papers, to the more solid but expensive wood panelling, architectural moldings, well-made panelled doors and chimney pieces, which at one time prevailed even in houses of modern rentals.

Furniture, therefore, has become independent, and accounting herself an art, and long since went forth like the prodigal son for a season of riotous living. Our interiors are handed over to the tenant by the builder, as it were, in blank, to be filled up from the upholsterer's store, the curiosity shop and auction room, where a large contribution from the conservatory of the nearest florist gives a finishing touch to the mixture which characterizes the present taste for furnishing parlor or boudoir.

There is, happily, at the present time an ambition on the part of many well-to-do persons to imitate the objects in the houses of old families, where for generations valuable and memorable articles of decorative furniture have been accumulated, just as plate, pictures and china have been preserved. Of course it is possible to produce great individuality of effect by the collection of old or new furniture of different styles and periods, if the owner possesses taste and judgment. The cabinet which reminds its owner of a tour in Italy, the quaint stool from Algiers, and the embroidered piano cover from Spain, are to those who are in the habit of travelling pleasant souvenirs; so are also presents from friends, if they possess really artistic merit; the screens and flower-stands and photographs, which are reminiscences of the forms and places separated from us by distance and death. The test of the whole question of the arrangement of furniture in our living rooms is the amount of judgment and discretion displayed.

But it frequently appears that such collections are made very hastily and in the brief intervals of a busy commercial or political life—the collections are not the best or most suitable; and where so much is required in such a short space of time it becomes impossible to devote a sufficient sum of money to procure really valuable specimens; in their place the effective and well-priced reproductions of an old pattern are added—a conglomeration of articles requiring attention and taking up space. The result is that the apartment becomes incongruous and overcrowded, an evidence of the wealth rather than the taste of the owner.